

Exclusion through Gender and Sexuality Norms: Learners' Motivation and Engagement in Language Education

(Pengecualian melalui Norma Jantina dan Seksualiti: Motivasi dan Penglibatan Pelajar dalam Pendidikan Bahasa)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how gender- and sexuality-related norms embedded in English language education operate as a hidden curriculum and shape marginalised learners' motivation, identity, and engagement. Drawing on critical applied linguistics and Darwin & Norton's (2015) expanded Model of Investment, the study analyses narrative interview data from learners who experienced discomfort or exclusion related to gender and sexuality in school-based English education. The findings show that fixed representations of speakers and normalised gender norms imposed psychological burdens on learners who became aware of and were marginalised by these ideologies. While some participants regarded such exclusion as inevitable within formal education, many reported strong motivation when English was experienced as a practical means of real-world communication and cultural connection outside the classroom. Because English-speaking communities were perceived as diverse, school practices that relied on stereotypes and limited forms of self-expression were understood as impractical, particularly in classrooms that required personal self-disclosure. The study further demonstrates how motivation formed through positive cultural encounters generates expectations for "practical, culturally connected language education." When these expectations conflict with exclusionary educational ideologies, learners reinterpret marginalisation as evidence of the impracticality of school English rather than as a rejection of the target language. This reinterpretation reshapes future-oriented identities and reduces investment in school-based education while preserving the possibility of investment in other learning contexts. The findings highlight the need for teaching that avoids stereotypes and supports diverse learners. This is not symbolic but a fundamental condition for making learners' investment in language learning a rational decision.

Keywords: Inclusive Language Education, Non-Binary Learners, Model of Investment, Critical Applied Linguistics, TESOL

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti bagaimana norma berkaitan jantina dan seksualiti yang tertanam dalam pendidikan bahasa Inggeris berfungsi sebagai kurikulum tersembunyi dan mempengaruhi motivasi, identiti, serta penglibatan pelajar yang terpinggir. Berasaskan linguistik gunaan kritikal dan Model Pelaburan (Model of Investment) yang diperluas oleh Darwin & Norton (2015), kajian ini menganalisis data temu bual naratif daripada pelajar yang mengalami ketidakselesaian atau pengecualian berkaitan jantina dan seksualiti dalam pendidikan bahasa Inggeris berasaskan sekolah. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa representasi penutur yang bersifat tetap serta normalisasi norma jantina menimbulkan beban psikologi kepada pelajar yang menyedari dan mengalami peminggiran akibat ideologi tersebut. Walau bagaimanapun, ramai peserta melaporkan tahap motivasi yang tinggi apabila bahasa Inggeris dialami sebagai alat praktikal untuk komunikasi dunia sebenar dan hubungan budaya di luar bilik darjah. Oleh sebab komuniti penutur bahasa Inggeris dilihat sebagai pelbagai, amalan pendidikan sekolah yang bergantung pada stereotaip dan mengehadkan bentuk ekspresi sendiri difahami sebagai tidak praktikal, terutamanya dalam kelas yang memerlukan pelajar bercakap tentang diri mereka sendiri. Kajian ini selanjutnya menunjukkan bahawa motivasi yang terbentuk melalui pertemuan budaya yang positif melahirkan jangkaan terhadap "pendidikan bahasa yang praktikal dan berhubung dengan budaya." Apabila jangkaan ini bertentangan dengan ideologi pendidikan

yang bersifat eksklusif, pelajar mentafsir semula pengalaman peminggiran bukan sebagai penolakan terhadap bahasa sasaran itu sendiri, tetapi sebagai bukti ketidakpraktisan pendidikan bahasa Inggeris di sekolah. Tafsiran semula ini membentuk semula identiti yang berorientasikan masa depan dan mengurangkan pelaburan dalam pendidikan berasaskan sekolah, sambil mengekalkan kemungkinan pelaburan dalam konteks pembelajaran lain. Dapatan tersebut menekankan keperluan pengajaran yang mengelakkan stereotaip dan menyokong kepelbagaian pelajar. Ini bukan bersifat simbolik, tetapi merupakan syarat asas untuk menjadikan pelaburan pelajar dalam pembelajaran bahasa sebagai suatu keputusan yang rasional.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Bahasa Inklusif; Pelajar Non-Biner; Model Pelaburan; Linguistik Gunaan Kritis; TESOL

INTRODUCTION

Language and gender are closely intertwined. This is because language and social agreements are deeply connected. The gender theory within post-structuralism argues that gender is constructed through social practices. Butler (1990) explains gender as performative; it is not a fixed identity, but an ongoing series of acts that repeatedly enact norms and expectations that define what it means to be 'feminine' or 'masculine.' Individuals become intelligible of gendered subjects only by citing and performing these norms repeatedly. Additionally, linguistic habits reflect society's gender bias (Lan & Jingxia, 2019). By learning a language usage whose meanings are socially defined, individuals become socialised and acculturated into particular social practices (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011; Parajuli, 2021). Therefore, learning languages can be equivalent to introducing the idea of gender within the culture; language serves as a medium through which ideas about gender are transmitted, reinforced, and reproduced.

Language education and social power structure are also connected. Gee (2005) proposed Discourse Theory, which explains that language and education are practices embedded within society. Since languages take part in constructing gender, ignoring the gender representation issue in language education is not a neutral act but reinforces the social power structure. Critical applied linguistics has demonstrated that school education, particularly English language teaching practices, contains a hidden curriculum inseparable from its social, political, and cultural context (Pennycook, 2001).

As part of the hidden curriculum, various norms, including gender norms, are communicated implicitly in the classroom (Kärner & Schneider, 2024). It explains how education unconsciously transmits bias and stereotypes. Stereotypes in educational environments can affect the support students receive and their emotional security, and can raise or lower students' academic performance. DeCuir-Gunby (2022) reported that racial and ethnic stereotypes held by teachers unconsciously altered their attitudes and behaviours toward students. Additionally, it has been pointed out that gender roles and gender stereotypes in school put pressure on students to follow them, which can lead to a decline in the mental health of students who do not conform to these norms (Loso et al., 2023; Lowry, 2018).

Fixed Norms and Exclusion in Education

As seen before, bias can operate as a hidden curriculum and influence learners without their awareness. At the same time, for those who recognise it, it becomes an explicit ideology that actively shapes their learning environment. Sociocultural approaches in EFL and second language acquisition [SLA] education explain the relationship between the ideologies embedded in educational contexts and the identities of learners, as well as meaning-making processes, through the model of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Darwin & Norton, 2015). A learning environment is shaped by various elements, e.g., textbooks, teachers' instructional practices, classmates, and the school curriculum. When learners are confronted with such norms and ideologies,

they construct their own positions within the power structures. Therefore, to examine the bias embedded in a learning environment, it is essential to analyse it through learners' narratives.

Through a case study, Yoo (2025) found that marginalised learners, ethnically and linguistically, may reduce their motivation and investment in language learning. Baros (2022) showed that non-binary identity was not expected, and such students felt language- and culture-specific stressors in language class, while binary-transgender students did not. Verkuyten et al. (2019) showed that when discriminatory learning environments threatened learners' social identity, learners could lower their engagement as a defensive response.

The Limitation of the Previous Research and Theoretical Background

Despite these contributions, prior research has several limitations. First, interview-based studies in critical applied linguistics have tended to focus primarily on learners' experiences within school-based language education, treating the school as the primary context shaping learners' psychological responses. However, learners also accumulate experiences related to the target language outside school, including cultural exposure, informal communication, and practical language use. Because learners live across multiple contexts while simultaneously participating in school language education, analyses restricted to school-based narratives may not adequately capture how exclusion in school education is interpreted, relativised, or negotiated in relation to broader language-related experiences. As a result, it often remains unclear whether reduced engagement reflects a decline in motivation itself or a relocation of learners' efforts to contexts outside school.

Norton's Model of Investment addresses this limitation by analytically separating motivation from engagement. Traditional applied linguistics tended to analyse learners' inner selves to explain their attitudes in learning. In other words, it assumed that a desirable state of motivation would naturally increase engagement. In contrast, Norton conceptualises learners as agents who evaluate the relative importance of different practices and decide whether to invest time, effort, and resources in particular contexts. Investment emerges at the intersection of identity, ideology, and capital (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Identity refers to how learners understand their relationship to the world and their possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013). Ideology consists of normative ideas that shape what is considered appropriate or legitimate and position

learners within learning environments even before they speak. Capital refers to abilities or attributes that gain value depending on social and cultural contexts. Through this framework, it becomes possible to explain situations in which learners maintain high motivation toward the target language while exhibiting low engagement in specific educational settings.

In summary of the research gaps, previous research on exclusion and bias in school language education has focused primarily on what occurs within schools or on changes in learners' motivation for school classes. As a result, it has not taken into account learners' broader language experiences outside school. It therefore remains unclear how exclusive school environments differentially affect motivation and investment. By employing the Model of Investment, this study distinguishes factors influencing motivation from those shaping engagement, thereby illuminating how the exclusive normativity presented in language education is processed across learners' overall language-learning experiences. Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to the development of more effective and equitable language education.

This research sets research questions [RQs] as follows:

RQ1. What gender and sexuality ideologies are embedded in foreign language education, and how do they construct learners' identities?

RQ2. How do marginalised learners negotiate their attitudes under exclusive ideologies, and how does this process shape investment differently from motivation?

METHODOLOGY

Learners who had experienced discomfort related to gender or sexuality representations or treatments in school language education were corrected. Individuals were recruited via snowball sampling and enrolled in the study based on their self-assessment of having such experiences.

Participants

Seven participants took part in the interviews, each tagged as P1 to P7 by the researcher in this paper. They all grew up in Japan, and speak Japanese as their first language. Their age range was 18 to 25 years. Gender identities were either non-binary, questioning, or a man. Fundamental information on the participants' language-learning experiences is presented in TABLE

1. Participants' English proficiency levels were three at A2, one at B1, and three at B2. Six participants had taken a second foreign language at university. Although exam and test preparation were common motivations, only one participant studied solely for testing purposes.

The remaining participants pursued language learning for a combination of reasons, with specific motivations differing across individuals, including practical conversation, personal hobbies, and university research.

TABLE 1. Basic Information About Participants

ID	Gender identity	English learning experiences		Other languages
		English learning environments	CEFR	
P1	Questioning	School classes Clam school	B1	Russian; French; Korean
P2	Man	English conversation school School classes	B2	Korean; Swahili; Tibetan; Chinese
P3	Non-binary	School classes Clam school English club at school	A2	German
P4	Non-binary	School classes Application (Duolingo)	A2	French
P5	Non-binary	School classes Online English Conversations Clam school	A2	Chinese
P6	—	School classes	B2	Chinese
P7	Non-binary	School classes English conversation school Clam school Studying abroad	B2	French; Russian; Lithuanian; German; Latin; Ancient Greece

Note. Participants reported their gender identities in the pre-interview Google form. 'Questioning' refers to individuals who are exploring their gender identity or who are comfortable with not having a fixed gender identity; 'Non-binary' refers to individuals who do not view gender as a binary category of "man or woman."

"Learning Environment" presents participants' responses to the question of how and where they learned English.

CEFR level was self-estimated. The answer was at the time of participation. Participants read the explanation of each level and estimated their English level.

Some reported "*Signed Japanese*" as their language-learning experience. However, they were deleted because, unlike *Japanese Sign Language*, it represents a signed form of Japanese rather than a distinct linguistic system.

Interview Procedure and Analysis

Interviews were conducted individually. Depending on the participant's location, they were held face-to-face or online. Participants first received an explanation of the research and submitted a written consent form. Next, they completed a basic information questionnaire on Google Forms, including details about their gender identity and language-learning experiences. Following this, the interview session began and was audio

recorded.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted 20 to 45 minutes, depending on the participants' length of answers for each question. Questions were constructed of six categories: backgrounds of participants' language learning, psychological factors such as motivators and demotivators, learning materials, Japanese expressions in EFL textbooks, and wishes and suggestions for teachers and learning materials developers. Detailed items were listed in TABLE 2.

TABLE 2. Interview Questions

Main categories	Topics
Background	English learning history Second foreign language at university Other language learning experiences Language learning experiences outside of school
Psychological factors	Experiences of motivation shifts in learning languages
Learning materials	Like or dislike toward language learning materials Gender stereotypes in language learning materials
Classroom experiences	Gender stereotypes in classes performed by others
Translations	Japanese expressions in second language textbooks
Wishes and suggestions	Ideal learning materials and classroom practices

Interview data were analysed quantitatively, following Braun & Clarke (2006); the researcher first segmented each remark into a meaningful unit and added codes that summarised its content. Then, codes

were organised according to their relevance or similarity, and more abstract conceptual categories were created. The entire procedure is summarised in FIGURE 1.

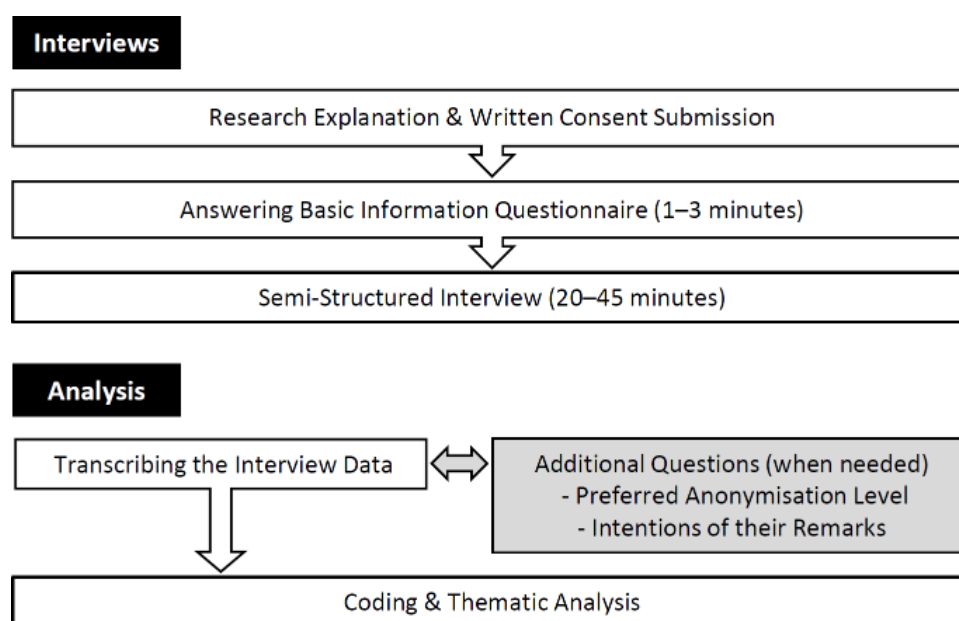


FIGURE 1. Interview Procedures

To enhance analytic validity, these processes were reviewed by a PhD student who had majored in pedagogy and has expertise in gender and sexual diversity. The reviewer examined the initial codes and higher-order categories for clarity and coherence with the data. Any discrepancies or alternative interpretations were discussed collaboratively until consensus was reached.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were followed as required by the

Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Tsukuba. Before any procedures began, participants received a full explanation of the study and provided written consent.

To protect participants' privacy, place names and personal names were anonymised by replacing them with labels such as <person 01>. In addition, after the interview sessions, participants were asked about the degree of anonymisation they preferred, including previously learned languages, age at the time of study abroad, prior coursework, family composition, and remarks that could reveal assigned sex or the history

of gender identity shifts. The pronouns used in this paper to refer to the participants were submitted by themselves. When participants did not provide pronouns, this paper automatically assigned the singular *they/them* pronouns for anonymity.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

While conducting the analysis, five frames were developed. Four of these were situation classifications: 1. *Learning Environment* (teachers, peers, curriculum, and classroom practices), 2. *Learning Materials* (textbooks, examinations, and other learning materials), 3. *Linguistic Cultures and Forms* (e.g., translation practices, grammar, vocabulary), 4. *Personal Factors* (extracurricular experiences and self-motivation). These frames were established because the same issue or thematic pattern can emerge in different ways depending on the situations and contexts in which it appears. Using these made it possible to identify the extent to which each theme emerged through multiple situations. In addition, 5. *Responses and Reflections* (stances and suggestions regarding ideal school language education) was included to capture learners' underlying attitudes, interpretations, and aspirations for change.

In this section, the findings were reorganised by content-based themes. This approach allows the analysis to depict both cross-contextual commonalities and context-specific experiences, as well as revealing the combined impact of these conditions on learners' perceptions and orientations.

In total, 444 codes, including some overlaps, were generated from the text data of the seven research participants, and these were classified into 14 higher-level and 47 lower-level categories. There were 111 codes related to *Learning Environments*, 67 codes related to *Learning Materials*, 55 codes related to *Linguistic Cultures and Forms*, 94 codes related to *Personal Factors*, and 117 codes related to *Responses and Reflections*.

The interviews were conducted in Japanese; therefore, the English remarks presented in the results section were the researcher's translations. For quotations in this paper, the English translation is used mainly, followed by the original Japanese utterance in parentheses using ('*Japanese*'). Square brackets show elements that the researcher added to clarify the tone or the meaning. "[...]" indicates some utterances omitted by the researcher when citing.

The participants' negative experiences fell into two categories: those inherent in language learning (higher category: *Non-Social-Norm Related Factors*)

and those arising from social biases embedded within the learning environment (higher category: *Social-Norm Related Biases*). The former includes difficulties with grammar and vocabulary learning, as well as difficulty asking questions to teachers. The latter includes normativity of gender and sexuality, and prejudice regarding appearance and nationality. Frequently reported negative experiences stemmed from socially embedded biases.

Gender Roles, Cisnormativity, and Heteronormativity

To address RQ1, the following first presents the parts of the analysis that relate to participants' experiences of bias in school. The negative ideologies in English education consisted of four: cisnormativity, heteronormativity, gender roles, and stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes and roles, as well as gender inequality, were mentioned as biases in textbooks and classroom discourse by five participants. In textbooks, characters who behaved in stereotypical ways were mentioned (P3, P4, P5, P7). Listening to or seeing overly gender-exaggerated speech in listening or translation passages was also mentioned as a stressful experience (P2, P3, P4). P4 talked about English-to-Japanese translations in English learning materials; the use of the sentence-final particle *da wa*, which is a cue to strongly feminine speech, and is often not used in real speech but is used for fictional characters as role language (Kinsui, 2013/2017), was the problem. P4: The Japanese reference translations often have the girl saying things like "blah blah *da wa*," so the translations end up sounding like they're overly emphasising femininity [...]

(*Nihongo yaku toshite sansho sareru mono ga, yappari onnanoko wa "nantoka da wa" mitai ni nattetari toka, nanka kado ni joseisei o kyocho shita yona yakubun ni nattetari toka shite*)

P7 said that these stereotypes not only made them feel uncomfortable but also directly discouraged them from learning: P7: In a model sentence - I just remembered something like, "The father works, the mother stays at home" [...] when I see a series of sentences like that, it really kills my motivation [...].

(*Reibun toka de, omoidashita, nanka ma, "chichi wa hataraku, haha wa, nanka, ie de" mitai na [...] so iu bunsho ga, ko, tsuratsura, ko, aru to, ko, yaruki mo useru node [...]*)

P1 mentioned that teachers presented gender stereotypes, such as "Boys, you must like baseball, but you aren't interested in flowers ('*boizu, yakyu ga*

sukidesho toka, nanka, hana ni wa kyomi ga naidesho toka')) and treated students differently according to their gender. P1 reported that there were "uncomfortable feelings I've always had (*'zutto kanjiteta iwakan'*)" about it; they recognised even the people lumped together as *boys* were diverse, and stated: P1: I've always wondered, why do they separate people so much? Saying "boys and girls," well, why do they split people right down into two and treat them differently?

('Nande sonna ni wakeru no to wa zutto omotte mashita. Sono, boizu ando garuzu de, sono, nanka, mapputatsu ni shite betsu no atsukai o surutte iu no wa doshite nano tte.')

The gender bias presented by teachers was often driven by attitudes that assumed that all students were the majority, both in terms of gender and sexuality. Six participants out of seven mentioned gender binarity norms and cisnormativity that the school provides, which considers everyone to be cisgender, whether a woman or a man. This was expressed through teachers, peer learners, and textbooks. P5 and P4 described an experience in which they found it troubling that a teacher conducted lessons that assumed students' gender identities were binary.

P5: In class, sometimes conversation scripts are used, and students are asked to read them in pairs, right? When the teacher divides the roles like, "Okay, boys read this part and girls read that part," I end up wondering which side I should join, so I don't like that.

('Jugyo de kaiwabun toka ga dete kite, pea ni natte yomu mitaina koto aruja naidesuka. Ja danshi wa kore yonde, joshi wa kore yonde ne minai na wakekata wo sareru to, un, docchi ni haittara ii tte kimochi ni wa naru node, sore wa sukiku nai desu ne.')

P2: I saw that teachers assumed a student was male just based on their name and voice, and assigned them a part to read. And, yeah, that made me think, could this end up being misgendering? It made me nervous.

('Namae to koe dake de mo dansei tte handan shite, docchi o iu ka o kime saserareterun da na tte iu no o mita node. Sore de, un, nanka, misujiendaringu ni naranai ka na tte iu. Hiyahiya shimashita.')

While these are operational issues in classrooms that can occur regardless of the English lessons, the English language's feature that explicitly indicates gender through pronouns makes these biases even more apparent. All participants mentioned the use of gendered pronouns. P1 said that when they learned in their first year of junior high school that English explicitly uses "she" and "he," they felt it "really

unnatural (*'sugoi iwakan ga atta'*)" because they had never considered this when they were speaking in Japanese. Regarding the use of pronouns, students often experienced discomfort or difficulty when such pronouns were used to refer to them. Because pronouns are used by others, gender assumptions are mediated by teachers' and classmates' remarks.

P4: During classes, when we had activities to talk with others, in such moments, um, others used the pronoun *she* for me without thinking, and I felt, how to say, well, uncomfortable about that.

('Jugyooyarunakade, sorekosominnadehanashite miyo mitai na, so natta toki ni, ano, nachuraru ni, ano, daimeishi wa "she" tte tsukawareru no ga, nanka, ma, igokochi warui na tte omotta koto ga arimasu.')

Many of the participants had difficulty expressing themselves in a foreign language. As for the reason, some stated they had never learned about gender-neutral methods or the language usage of non-binary native speakers. Others knew the expressions that fit for them, but were unable to say them in class. Regarding pronouns, none of the participants achieved the self-expression they desired.

Heteronormativity presented in the teaching materials was mentioned frequently (P1, P3, P4, P6).

P3: When the topic of romantic partners came up, the woman's partner was always male, and, well, both gender identities were always set as 'a female is a woman,' and 'a male is a man.' I felt that the setting was really strict.

('Koibito no hanashi ga dete kita toki wa, maikai josei no aite wa dansei de, de, ano, docchi mo seijin wa "josei wa josei" de "daisei wa dansei" tte iu no wa sugoi kicchiri shite ta na tte iu no wa sugoi omoimasu ne.')

These made the learners feel alienated and uncomfortable. Regarding the expressions in the teaching materials that assumed romantic relationships between men and women, P1 said, "If you are a sexual minority, you'll feel tightness in your chest every time

('sekumai dattara, maikai, sono, kyutto naru'),"

and P6 spoke about the feeling of alienation as follows: P6: In the context of a class [...], a teacher said things like, "Everyone, when you get a boyfriend or girlfriend in the future," and it felt like heterosexual relationships were simply assumed, and everyone seemed to accept that without questioning it. It made me feel, kind of, how to say, like I was the only one being left behind.

(*Jugyo no sensei no hanashi no susumekata de [...] “shorai wa minna kareshi kanojo ga dekitara” mitai na, so iu hanashi o sarete, iseikan no renai ga, ko, zentei de, minna mo sore o, ko, nandaro, gimon- gimonshi nashi de ukeireterun da na tte iu kanji ga shite, chotto, ko, nandaro, jibun dake torinokosareteru mitai na kankaku ga*)

When cisnormativity and heteronormativity were linked to gender explicit language features, some participants experienced discriminative values of their teacher or classmates being revealed (P2, P4, P7). P4 talked about classmates' remarks about laughing at gay people:

P4: I think it was in junior high school. One student misinterpreted words such as “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” as simply meaning a male friend and wrote a sentence like “his boyfriend.” Then some students said things like, “Wow, that’s so *homo* [a homophobic term referring to gay people in Japanese]”

(*Chugakko gurai desu kane. Nanka boifurendo garufurendo tte iu kotoba o otoko tomodachi mitaina mono to nanka kanchigai suru mimtai na no de, nanka, “his boyfriend” mitai na bunsho o, nanka, tsukutta hito ga itara “sore nanka meccha homo jan” mitai na kanji no, nanka, kaiwa o shiteta hito ga ita*)

Similarly, P7 talked about a teacher being transphobic, expressing it through gender explicit pronouns: P7: A teacher deliberately made a mistake in the use of pronouns and said something like, “You’re a man, so if you use ‘she,’ that’s basically like being trans [abbreviation for *transgender*], and you don’t want that.”

(*Wazato sensei ga rei to shite, “kimi wa otoko dakedo, nanka, she tte tsukattara, nanka, toransu mitai na koto ni naru kara yameta ho ga i” mitaina, so iu koto o, ko, wazato machigaete, so iu fu ni itte.*)

While there were negative references to bias in English education, there were also positive experiences of inclusion. P4 mentioned that one of their high school English teachers introduced the third-person singular pronoun *they/them*. P4 explained that the teacher said, “I use it because the person I refer to doesn’t necessarily think of themselves as a woman (*Watashi ga kore o tsukau no wa, kanarazushimo, sashita hito ga, jibun o josei da to omotteru to wa kagiranai kara desu*)” (P4 was going to an all-female high school) and used *they* as the primary pronoun when referring to students; P4 thought it was a positive thing, thinking, “Wow, that’s amazing (*a, sugoi*).”

In a current situation where the masculine form is often presented as the base form (Kanzaki, 2022), P2 noticed that in the textbooks for his foreign language classes at university, “she” always preceded “he.” Understanding that this was intentional, P2 commented that he felt positive about the teaching materials, which challenged the male-dominated stereotype.

P2: [In the textbook,] “she” always came before “he.” Even in the lists, “she” was consistently written first. I thought that was really nice.

(*“Kare wa” “kanojo wa” ga, kanarazu “kanojo wa” ga saki ni kite ite. Ko, mo tetteishite ichiranhyo mitai na tokoro demo, “kare wa” yorimo “kanojo wa” ga sakini kakarete arimasita. Ano, yoi na to.*)

Participants who discussed using Duolingo, P1 and P4, praised its inclusive contents, commenting that “I often feel unmotivated (*Yaruki ga agaru na tte koto ga kekko arimasu*)” (P4) when seeing non-heteronormative representation in the application. They also reported that other learning materials placed greater value on learners.

P4: In Duolingo [...] a male character said ‘my boyfriend’ or a female character said ‘my girlfriend.’ When I saw such expressions, I thought, ‘Wow, that’s amazing.’ So, it made me realise how much things are usually presented in fixed stereotypes.

(*Duolingo tte [...] sorekoso dansei ga “watashi no boifurendo” tte ittari toka, josei ga “watashi no garufurendo” tte iu fu na no ga deta toki ni “o, sugoi” tte omotta node, gyaku ni fudan tte iu no wa mechamecha, sore koso, nante iuka, sutereotaipu de kotei sarete tan da na tte iu no o aratame te omotta tte iu.*)

P1: I’d like textbooks to be a bit more like Duolingo. For example, by including depictions of romantic couples. Or even if it’s not about couples, well, just don’t push a fixed moral value.

(*Duolingo no kanji wo chotto mane shite hoshi na to omoimasu. Tatoeba kappuru toka. Ato ma, kappuru ja nakute mo, nandaro, rinrikan o oshituketekuru kanji janakute*)

In this way, when participants feel that bias in classes is reduced and assumes diverse learners, they feel the ideology is inclusive and increase engagement.

P4: In class, I think that when people with a variety of genders and sexualities are considered as learners, it makes me happy and boosts my motivation.

(*Jugyo, jibun wa yappari ironna jenda toka sekushuaritei no hito ga zentei ni saretara, nanka ureshiku natte iyoku ga agaru ka na tte*

omoimasu.')

Responses to the Bias and Ideal Education

The presentation of these ideologies caused two reactions within participants: change-oriented reflections, which hope for change, and acceptance and resignation, which regard the bias as unchangeable.

Change-oriented reflections primarily focused on hope for inclusion and diversity, as well as on bias reduction. Regarding learning materials, the main points mentioned were reducing stereotypes (P1, P2, P7), increasing diverse gender representation (P1, P3, P4), and including diversity-related topics (P1, P6). Regarding teachers and class content, participants hoped that teachers would mention how non-binary native speakers use the language (P1, P2, P4), and recognise that students are diverse and avoid assumptions (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7).

P7: As for the teaching materials, first, I think it would be great if they include something like how non-binary people actually use the language

('Kyoza wa yappari, mazu sono nonbainari ga do sono gengo o tsukau no ka mitaina koto ga kaite attara sugoku i na tte omou')

P6: I think I'd be happy if there were learning materials that also include topics like diversity.

('Daibashitei to ka so iu neta mo toriireteru yona kyoza ga attara ureshi ka na tte iu.')

There were many comments wanting language education to be practical, with connections to culture and practical lessons. Some participants hoped for learning materials to use practical expressions in modern society (P5, P7), and for teachers to be more conscious of the connection between classes and society, and to design classes that are useful in practice (P3, P5).

P7: Besides grammar, I want to focus on actually using the language, so I think it would be great if there were textbooks that include expressions you can really use.

('Ato wa bunpo mo sodesu kedo, yappari jissai ni tsukau tte iu no o watashi wa jushi shitai node, so iu noni tsukaeru yona, ano, hyogen toka ga notteru kyokasho ga attara i na tte omoimasu.')

The hope for reduced bias and diverse representation was expressed as a solution to reduce psychological load in the educational setting, but it was also connected to practical reasons such as the desire for smooth communication and the need for self-expression. For example, P3 said that they wanted some characters

to be someone whose gender were not mentioned in the teaching materials; there was "the importance of not being clarified till the end ('saigo made hyoki sarenai tte iu no no juyosei')"

P3: Well, I don't really identify myself as either a man or a woman. So I feel like I'd like to see a character who seems to go well with both gender labels.

('Watashi wa, sono, nanka, jibun no seibetsu no ishiki ga, ma, dansei gawa ni mo josei gawa nimo itte nai node. Docchi ni atehamattemo hen ja nai tojojinbutsu tte iu no hoshii na tte omottari suru n desu yo ne.')

P3: There was a time in English class when we had to talk about someone we respect, and the person I chose was a Japanese artist who hadn't disclosed their gender. But no matter how much I explained that, the teacher just couldn't understand their response was something like, "People always reveal their gender," and it was really difficult to make it understood.

('Eigo no sensei de, sonkei suru jinbutsu o kotaeyo mitai na kai ga atta toki ni, watashi ga, sono, sonkei suru jinbutsu datta no ga, seibetsu o kokai shite nai nihonjin no ateisuto datta n desu kedo, sore o ikura setsumei shitemo rikai shite itadakenakatta koto ga atte, ano, seibetsu wa kokai shiteru monda mitaina kanji datta no ga, koko wa chotto muzukashi tte natta tte iu no ga atte.')

On the other hand, some people did not desire such changes but gave up. There were three types of acceptance and resignation, as shown in FIGURE 2: justificatory acceptance, resigned acceptance, and self-defensive acceptance.

Justificatory acceptance means they think the validity of biases and accept them as somewhat necessary, even though they were not happy about that.

P4: As for the characters in textbooks, they often seem to be based on stereotypical 'men' and 'women.' I guess that's kind of inevitable if you're trying to show representativeness like, to make them feel more general.

('Kyoza ni dete kuru tojojinbutsu mitai na no, kekko yappari sutereotaipu teki na danjo o moto ni shiteru tte iu no wa, ma, nanka, daihyo sei o dasu tame ni wa shikatanai no ka na tte iu. Ippan sei o dasu to iu ka.')

P3: I feel like they may be deliberately using templates to make learning easier... so even though

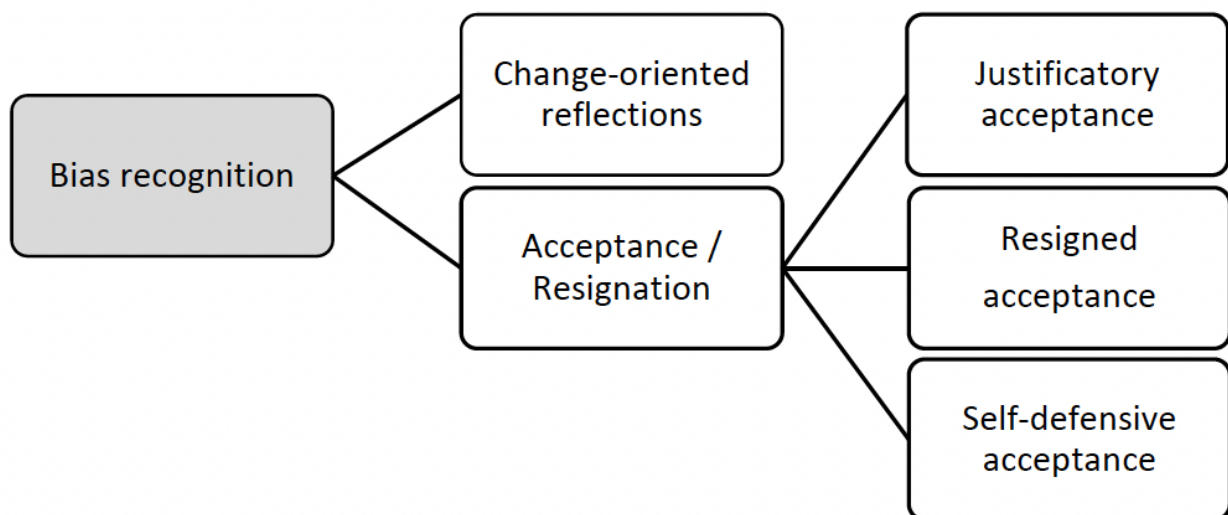


FIGURE 2. Categories of Attitudes Toward Bias

I kind of dislike it, it's more like I've just resigned myself to it

(‘Tenpureto o aete tsukau koto ni yotte, sono manabiyasusa o umaku yudo shiyo to shiteru no kana mitaina...nomo atte, nanka jakkan iya de wa aru kedo, akirame ni chikakute’)

Resigned acceptance is a sense of helplessness that no bias can be changed. Basically, they thought it was commonplace that schools made minorities invisible and faced others' biased attitudes, and they accepted them as they were (P1, P3, P4).

Self-defensive acceptance is an attitude of recognising bias in the educational field as a problem, but passively accepting it because taking action to change it would cause further psychological stress and hassle (P4, P5, P6, P7). P4 explained why they never spoke up when they felt uncomfortable about being told what their pronouns were during group work:

P4: Even if I said, “Actually, I want you to use ‘they’ for me,” it wouldn’t be understood. It would seem too sudden, and others would probably think I’m strange. People don’t even know that such pronouns exist. In class, there’s no stage where you can show what pronouns you want to be referred to, so if I say that, I’d be the only one bringing it up, and I’d just seem weird that’s what I thought.

(‘Iya, jibun wa they no ho wo tsukatte hoshikute tte itte mo rikai sarenai daro shi, tototsu sugiru shi, nanka gyaku ni nanka henna me de mirareso de, nante iu ka, so iu daimeishi no sonzai ni tsuite mo minna shiranai shi. Nanka daimeishi, jibun wa kono daimeishi tsukatte hoshi desu tte fuezu ga nai kara, jibun dake iidashite mo nannka okashi hito

ni naru shi mitaina koto wa omoimashita.’)

Self-defensive acceptance is a passive response in which one accepts the current situation by weighing the current burden against the further burden that would result from presenting their hope for a change. Therefore, while one may be resigned to the situation, one can also adopt a change-oriented attitude that seeks change. P4 stated that, to prevent students from overestimating potential future insecurity and becoming unable to discuss it, teachers with inclusive values can disclose their stance.

P4: What I’d like from how can I say if teachers are allies, I want them to show that they are. If they did, I’d feel much more comfortable talking to them, and I might be able to use pronouns or a name that fit me in assignments. When you don’t know the stance that the teacher takes, it’s like a gamble to consult them about such matters.

(‘Kyoshi ni nozomu koto wa, nanka soiu nante iu kana, arai nara arai de aru koto o shimeshite hoshii na to omoimasu. Nanka soshitara, motto tabun anshin shite hatsugenshi tari, kadai mo, tatoeba jibun ga nozomu daimeishi toka, nannka jibunnga nozomu meisho no sei toka tsukaetari, ma, suru kana tte omou n de. Warito kake mitai na tokoro aru janai desu ka, yoku wakannai to.’)

Note that change-oriented reflections mentioned two main topics, bias and practicality, while the acceptance and resignation attitude was solely about bias. In other words, participants who recognised the impractical language education as a problem were not hesitant to talk about it as something to change. This

is quite opposite to what some stated about gender and sexuality bias in class, declaring them as “It is what it is (*Sonna mon kana*)” (P4) or “Nothing can change even if I talk about it (*Ittemo, mo shoganai*)” (P1).

To sum up, erasure was understood as a common form of bias. The normative idea of gender and sexualities was expressed in the erasure of minorities. Non-binary identities and diverse forms of gender and sexuality were highly frequently absent from textbooks, teacher remarks, and peer discourse (all participants). Also, these norms were presented as the explicitly practised bias, i.e., assumptions on students that put them into the majority box, and sometimes even as an explicit transphobia or homophobia (P2, P4, P7). These normative practices correspond to Moore (2020)’s two most heteronormative stages in textbooks, i.e., heteronormative erasure and explicit heterosexism. The interview showed that being constantly treated as invisible produced psychological discomfort. In such a situation, some hoped for change, while others adopted a sense of resignation that it was natural for them to be ignored.

Answering RQ1 (“What gender and sexuality ideologies are embedded in foreign language education, and how do they construct learners’ identities?”), the findings indicate that foreign language education mainly assumes learners to be both cisgender and heterosexual. This underlying ideology is further reinforced through the depiction of stereotypical gender behaviours, which at times reveals an androcentric bias. Within such an educational environment, participants developed learner identities characterised by feelings of illegitimacy and marginalisation; they perceived that their presence and experiences were neither anticipated nor recognised in the classroom. The lack of diverse gender and sexuality representations, together with the reliance on fixed stereotypes, often prevented participants from relating to textbook scenarios or viewing classroom communication as reflective of authentic language use. As a result, some participants felt unable to develop authentic communicative competence because school settings restricted opportunities for genuine self-expression, including the use of their preferred pronouns.

Motivations

To address RQ2, the following discusses participants’ attitudes towards the target language, aiming to reveal their engagement and motivational shifts. Although gender bias was mentioned linking to language education, that did not necessarily mean the negative impact of the language itself. The underlying

motivation for language learning and the image of language were created by other factors: the desire for actual communication and a positive impression of the culture.

Frequently, the primary motivation for learning a language was a preference for the culture and entertainment in the target language, e.g., movies, literature, pop stars, and YouTube videos (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7). P5 talked about their experience of becoming “obsessed with foreign animation series (*Kaigai no anime ni hamatta*)”, saying:

P5: When I can use English or another language in something I enjoy, I feel like, “Okay, let’s study it.”

(*‘Suki na mono de eigo toka hokano gengo ga tsukaeru yo tte naru to, a, yaruka tte kimochi ni wa nari masu.’*)

The desire to communicate with speakers of the target language also increased motivation to learn. P2 commented that they enjoyed actually speaking with native speakers in the language they were studying; P7 said that being in an environment where they had to use the language increased their motivation to learn; P4 and P6 said that they have someone they want to communicate with in target language, or that they would like to have the opportunity to do so in the future.

When a positive image of the culture and communication orientation drives fundamental motivations, a decline in the image of the target language culture may result in decreased learning engagement. For P3, one of their parents served as a role model for successful English learning. When P3 treated an overseas acquaintance kindly, but the person from abroad said discriminatory things about Japan behind their back, their parent told them, “Foreigners are often like this, so you should just get used to it (*Gaikoku jin tte kekko ko iu mon da kara, omae no ho ga narenasai*)”; they talked about their following loss of motivation, saying:

P3: I was like, wow, I can’t handle this, I can’t deal with people from overseas, and I can’t even deal with my <parent 01>. [...] My motivation to learn English really dropped drastically. And honestly, it’s still down. It just hasn’t gone back up.

(*‘Uwa, yatte ikenai, kaigai no hito to yatte ikenai, <parent 01> to mo yatte ikenai mitaina kanji ni nacchatte. [...] Eigo no mochibeshon ga honto ni ichijirushiku sagacchatta tte iu no wa ari masu ne. Sagatta mama desu ne. Chotto agannai desu.’*)

P3 stated that although they could objectively understand that the parent’s comments were distorted

and that they should not be influenced by them, they were still unable to avoid a decline in motivation, and their desire to work internationally dropped sharply.

P1 reported that they had studied English, French, and a little Korean, driven by cultural favour; whether through books, movies, or songs, when they encountered new favourite cultural elements in the languages, they said their motivation increased, and they began to learn a bit more. In the same way, they stated that their motivation to learn English had decreased when seeing the Trump administration's policies, which have taken a negative or antagonistic stance toward DE&I (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). They said, "When I see Trump getting really strong in America—when I watch such news, I feel a bit distant from the culture

(‘Amerika no sono, nanka, sugoi Toranpu tsuyoku nattari toka o miru to, nyusu miru to, nanka chotto amerika kara, ko, kimochi ga hanareru’)."

Motivated by a love for culture and a desire for communication, participants hoped for practical language education that is in line with the current culture around the target language and native speakers. Participants spoke positively about language classes (both about teachers and learning materials) that were connected to culture and taught practical language for real-world use (P4, P6, P7). Some hoped the education would become more closely connected to actual use in society, as they felt the classes neglected such application (P3, P5, P7), as P5 declared:

P5: How things were taught... yeah, even when teachers explained the grammatical structures, I couldn't really get what kind of situation I'd actually use them in. So, um, well. I guess I'd be happy if they could structure classes so that what we learn really feels useful when we speak, and you can see the direct connection to that.

(‘Susumekata, un, bunpo kozo o setsumei sareta to shite mo, honto ni sore wa doiu bamen de tsukau no ka toka ga nattoku ikinikukatta node, nanka, nandaro. Naratta mono ga chanto shaberu toki ni yaku ni tatsu yo, chokketsu suru yo tte iu no ga wakari yasui yo ni kosei shite kureru to ureshi kana to omoi masu.’)

Erased individuals felt that the English that school education provides is not connected to the actual use or reflects the reality of the native speakers. By being treated as invisible, learners who do not fit the majority's expectations lack opportunities to practise self-expression. The remarks about pronouns

especially highlighted students who could not learn or use non-binary pronouns in language classes, and therefore struggled when asked to talk with others and express themselves. This means that the singular third-person pronoun *they/them* is the fundamental tool for them to express themselves; that is why some students described not knowing gender-neutral expressions as troubling rather than uncomfortable, as P6 said:

P6: When I'm trying to write a sentence, sometimes I just get stuck, wondering what I should do.

(‘Bun toka wo kaku toki ni doshiyo kana tte nacchau toki wa aru’)

By being excluded, they were denied access to their practical English. Also, P4 stated that actual native speakers are diverse; they stated, "When it comes to actually using the language [the target language], well, there are also people like that [who don't identify as either male or female] abroad (*jissai sore o tsukau tte natta toki mo, ma, kaigai ni iru janai desu ka, souiu hito ga’*)" and it would be practical to learn the language use, which will not hurt non-binary people when you talk to them.

Answering RQ2 ("How do marginalised learners negotiate their attitudes under exclusive ideologies, and how does this process shape investment differently from motivation?"), participants' motivation, which was formed through positive feelings toward the target culture and a desire for communication remained high. However, the school context did not support investment. As shown in the model of investment, investment emerges in the intersection of ideology, identity, and capital. Participants encountered exclusive ideologies and developed negative learner identities. Their identities were not recognised as valuable forms of capital, as they were marginalised or ignored; consequently, this led to limited investment despite their sustained motivation.

Although learners were negatively affected at the level of ideology and identity, they did not report reduced positive perceptions of the language. Motivated learners expressed a willingness to pursue language learning in practical education, suggesting that investment could occur in more inclusive environments. Actually, participants who had learned on inclusive platforms reported positive feelings and maintained their engagement because all three elements of investment were met. However, participants who developed negative impressions of the target culture lost motivation, which means investing in any platform is unlikely, regardless of its inclusivity.

Further Discussions

As discussed, participants' motivation was mainly rooted in their positive image of the target language and its culture. Consequently, they expected language education to be practical, connected to the target culture, and grounded in real linguistic practices. However, they experienced exclusive school instruction that offered limited opportunities for their self-expression.

Paradoxically, because participants perceived school education as impractical, they did not associate the biases present in school-based language education with the target language itself, maintaining their motivation. Their understanding that real cultures and speakers are diverse and that it is school education that filters this diversity helped them attribute such bias to the school context rather than to the target language. In this way, this awareness served as a mechanism that prevented school language learning from undermining their motivation rooted in a positive cultural orientation.

To summarise, this suggests a dual structure: exclusive learning environments generate two forms of negative experience: marginalisation and perceived impracticality. Both reduce learners' investment in school education. At the same time, motivation may remain intact because the school's exclusive ideology leads learners to view school instruction as impractical rather than representative of the target language.

CONCLUSION

Participants reported that language education included gender and sexuality norms, such as cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and gender stereotypes. They impose psychological burdens on learners who are aware of and excluded by them. After experiencing such fixed ideology multiple times, some wanted change, but others felt resigned, considering that minority exclusion in school was inevitable. Either way, the exclusive ideology lowers learners' investment, as the Model of Investment shows.

On the other hand, many reported feeling motivated when language classes offered practical lessons that are connected to real-world communication. Inclusion is one element that makes education practical; since the actual English speakers are diverse, providing fixed stereotypes is perceived as not reflecting reality. In addition, learners with excluded gender identities cannot earn the practical means of self-expression, even though they are asked to talk about themselves in class.

Additionally, this research demonstrates the influence of motivation on understanding the school's

ideology. Motivations came from positive views of the target language's culture. With the expectation of practical language education stemming from such motivation, learners interpreted the fixed ideology as a problem of "impracticality". It preserves their fundamental motivation, rather than transforming the negative experience of exclusion into a rejection of the language. Therefore, whereas the school environment was perceived as more negative, the possibility of greater investment in language learning in a better environment remained.

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